

My first concern lies in the area of child protection. The legislation significantly reduces the funds available for recruiting and licensing foster homes, monitoring children in foster care and other alternative placements, completing the court processes needed to free children for adoption, training and recruiting child protection case-workers, and other activities necessary to maintain an adequate program for abused and neglected children. The cap on child protection funds will put further strain on our already overburdened child protection system and could seriously inhibit states' ability to respond when a child is abused or neglected.

I am also concerned about whether the funds available for child care assistance are adequate to meet the needs of families as they move off welfare and into work. The availability of safe, affordable child care is essential to successful welfare reform. At the same time, we need to ensure that low income working families have access to child care assistance.

My third concern is about the extent of the changes in the Supplemental Security Income [SSI] program. The legislation will eliminate SSI eligibility for an estimated 21 percent of the children currently receiving benefits and reduce benefits for about 75 percent of the remaining children. While the creation of a two-tiered benefit system distinguishes between the most disabled children who require a higher level of services and those who are moderately and mildly disabled, the legislation places an overwhelming emphasis on physical disabilities. I believe the criteria used to differentiate between those receiving full benefits and those receiving reduced benefits should be reexamined.

I am relieved that the effective date for the cash assistance provisions in the bill has been changed to the 1996 fiscal year. This should give States adequate time to make the legislative and administrative changes needed to adjust to the block grant. Successful welfare reform will require careful consideration and planning, and States must be provided the opportunity for a thoughtful, deliberative process regarding how they want to proceed.

I believe that these concerns can be effectively addressed. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act is a bold move to change the way in which government responds to people in need of assistance—a move that needs to be taken.

#### LONGEST TERM RECORD

Mrs. KASSEBAUM. Mr. President, I would just like to acknowledge that today breaks the record for the longest term ever held by a Republican leader of the Senate. Senator DOLE, as the majority leader, has broken the record that is more than just showing up every day. Perhaps Senator DOLE is the Cal Ripken of the Senate. But I would

just like to express the appreciation of all of us for the dedicated leadership he has brought, the thoughtfulness and patience that it takes, and as a matter of fact his sheer grit.

I yield the floor.

Mr. MOYNIHAN. Mr. President, two records in 2 days. What do you say we give him a hand.

[Applause, Senators rising.]

#### PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND WORK ACT OF 1995—CONFERENCE REPORT

The Senate continued with the consideration of the conference report.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who yields time?

Mr. MOYNIHAN. Mr. President, I yield to my gallant friend from Massachusetts.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KERRY. I thank the Chair.

Mr. President, this is a profound and important debate about welfare reform that tests our resolve to change a system that is in need of change, but it is a debate which also tests our commitment to community to the sick and the hurting—to the elderly and the thousands of people who are looking for a helping hand from a government that will help them help themselves.

Every Senator here today knows the importance of helping families get back to work—get on the job and off the dole; but they also know the devastation of poverty—the lack of hope and the despair and frustrations that all of us see in our States.

Unfortunately the bill which we passed to reform welfare has turned for the worse in conference and threatens to injure children and people with disabilities.

Mr. President, this conference bill will increase poverty—not decrease it. It will increase despair and destroy hope among some of the poorest, sickest, and weakest Americans.

I cannot in good conscience—and I will not—vote for such an ill advised retreat from real reform—no matter how well intended it may be—no matter how deeply some or the other side of the aisle might feel about it.

This bill eats away at the strength of America because the strength of America is not found in its willingness to separate the rich from the poor.

No, the strength of America, as Hubert Humphrey said:

Lies with its people. Not people on the dole but on the job. Not people in despair but people filled with hope. Not people without education but people with skill and knowledge. Not people turned away but people welcomed by their neighbors as full and equal partners in our American adventure.

This is our strength, but this bill we are asked to vote on today does not play to that strength.

Mr. President, we all want to move people from welfare to work. But the conference report reduces the ability to put people back to work.

This conference bill is wrong because it's too harsh and it will injure children and families in significant ways.

It reduces SSI benefits for a large majority of disabled children by 25 percent. These are kids, Mr. President, with cerebral palsy, kids with Down's syndrome, muscular dystrophy, cystic fibrosis and AIDS.

I'm told that by the year 2002, some 650,000 low income children would be affected by this cut. In real numbers that means that the benefits to seriously disabled children would be cut from 74 percent of the poverty line to 55 percent of the poverty line; and with all due respect to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle that cut was not in the Senate bill.

The current law ensures that AFDC families receive Medicare coverage. Under this bill that provision of the law would be repealed, leaving 1.5 million children at risk—and at least 4 million mothers would lose health coverage.

This conference bill undermines the school lunch program. It denies school lunches to certain categories of immigrant school children, including legal immigrants, and it would create an entire bureaucracy to determine the status of the children.

It would deny SSI and food stamps to immigrants who are legal permanent residents of the United States.

The bill includes \$32 billion in food stamp benefit cuts to the elderly and working poor—which means about a 20-percent cut to those families who are already working, who are struggling to make ends meet on a minimum wage job or with a Social Security check struggling to pay for basics to keep them from losing their apartments and ending up homeless and on the street.

When fully in effect the food stamp cuts will lower the average benefit level from 78 cents per person per meal to 62 cents—62 cents a meal.

Mr. President, what are we doing? Is this the kind of nation we have become?

The whole point of welfare reform was to identify the people who are on welfare but who are capable of working, and getting them off welfare and into jobs.

This conference bill does not accomplish that goal in the way we did in the Senate passed bill.

This bill hurts children, the sick and the elderly.

It hurts dependent children, more than half of whom live below the poverty line. It hurts disabled children, sick children, hungry children, children without a chance and often without a prayer for survival.

It hurts disabled elderly people, who deserve more in their old age, who seek only a little dignity and a little respect.

This bill raises the age at which impoverished elderly people could qualify for SSI, from 65 to 67 or even higher—and who does this affect? It is aimed